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From: StClair, Christie
Sent: Thur 10/22/2015 9:45:47 PM
Subject: RE: USA Today correction needed

Correction made.

Christie St. Clair

Office of Public Affairs

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From: Harrison, Melissa
Sent: Thursday, October 22, 2015 5:38 PM
To: Grantham, Nancy <Grantham.Nancy@epa.gov>; StClair, Christie <StClair.Christie@epa.gov>; Hull, George <Hull.George@epa.gov>
Subject: USA Today correction needed

Here's the link to send showing the investigation was initiated by EPA:
<http://www2.epa.gov/goldkingmine/epa-announces-us-department-interior-lead-independent-review-gold-king-mine-release>

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USA Today

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/10/22/investigation-says-gold-king-mine-blowout-caused-failure-check-flooding/74411118/>

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Investigation says Gold King Mine blowout caused by failure to check flooding

Trevor Hughes, USA TODAY 5:19 p.m. EDT October 22, 2015

DENVER – Environmental officials who caused a massive mine blowout that contaminated the Animas River through three states this summer failed to check how much water was inside the flooded Gold King Mine before they ordered excavations, according to a new federal report ordered by Congress.

The 132-page report stops short of blaming anyone specific for causing the blowout, which turned the southwestern Colorado river a bright orange-yellow for several days. But the report identifies a series of mistakes, chief among them that the EPA failed to measure the water's depth before digging through the collapsed entrance of the mine.

An estimated 3 million gallons of contaminated water began pouring out, at one point shooting two feet into the air, before cascading down the rocky hillside. The tainted water contaminated Cement Creek and then the Animas River, which flows from Silverton through Durango, Colo. and then into New Mexico and Arizona.

The report also has a serious warning: "In preparing this report, (the Bureau of Reclamation) found that the conditions and actions that led to the Gold King Mine incident are not isolated or unique, and in fact are surprisingly prevalent."

The shocking, albeit temporary, color of the river drew international attention as water contaminated with iron-oxyhydroxide sediment and heavy metals gushed downstream before the EPA could build temporary retaining ponds to divert and treat the pollution.

The Bureau of Reclamation operates and builds dams, and its Denver-based experts said the EPA should have consulted with them more closely before beginning work on the Gold King. The EPA had closely consulted with the BOR on draining another nearby mine, called the Red & Bonita.

More than 100,000 abandoned or unused mines dot the West, many of them leaking contaminated waste water into nearby rivers, especially when winter snows melt in the spring. But the EPA's actions drew massive and swift condemnation by politicians from both parties upset that the very agency supposed to be protecting the environment instead made things worse.

The EPA has also been criticized for failing to swiftly notify local officials about the breach, which happened in a mountainous area where there's no cell phone service.

The report says the EPA should have measured the mine's water level – as it had done at another mine just a few hundred feet away – before attempting to drain it.

“Had it been done, the plan to open the mine would have been revised, and the blowout would not have occurred,” the report says. The EPA was working on the mine at the request of Colorado officials, who worried it was contaminating drinking water for downstream residents.

The report, which was peer-reviewed by experts from two other federal agencies, says federal and state officials must develop plans to address the nation's abandoned or unused mines before another disaster happens. The report says there's a lack of oversight and monitoring of the risks posed by flooded mines. The Gold King's owner says the mine flooded when another nearby mine blocked its entrances.

“They represent a form of decaying infrastructure that is poorly maintained and, some of which, can fail with disastrous results. A collapsed flooded mine is in effect a dam, and failure must be prevented by routine monitoring, maintenance, and in some cases remediation,” the report concluded. “However, there appears to be a general absence of knowledge of the risks associated with these facilities.”

The mine spill forced downstream communities to temporarily halt using the river for drinking water, and prompted farmers in the Navajo Nation to truck in irrigation water for their crops. In a series of Congressional hearings, elected officials have excoriated the EPA for its handling of the incident, including the delay in informing downstream residents of the pollution.

The river has returned to its original color, but people living alongside it worry next spring's melting snow will stir up settled contamination and again contaminate the water.

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